

**DRAFT**  
**ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT**  
**Fishing Access Site Lease for the**  
**Roundup and Three Stall Sites, Blackfoot River**

*Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks*  
*Region 2 - Missoula*  
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**PART I. DESCRIPTION OF THE PROPOSED ACTION**

**Proposed Action:**

Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks (FWP) proposes to enter into a renewable five-year lease with private landowner Monroe Property Company to continue public use of the Roundup and Three Stall fishing access sites on the Blackfoot River. The landowner would provide the lease at no cost, allowing day-use river access and associated parking at both sites. FWP would provide management services characteristic of its Fishing Access Site (FAS) Program, including site maintenance, designation of vehicle parking areas, monitoring of public use, trash collection, signage, and enforcement of regulations. The lease sets an initial five-year term, and provides automatic five-year renewals unless either party gives notice that it desires to end the lease.

**Location:**

The Roundup (Exhibit A) and Three Stall (Exhibit B) fishing access sites are located along the Blackfoot River in Missoula County, about 35 miles east of Missoula and 5 miles southwest of Clearwater Junction. Each site is accessed by a short section of unpaved county road off of Montana Highway 200, with the Roundup FAS situated just west of the highway bridge in Section 25, Township 14 North, Range 15 West, and the Three Stall FAS situated on the river about three miles east of the highway in Section 29, Township 14 North, Range 14 West.

**History:**

Since the early 1970s, state and federal agencies, private landowners, nonprofit organizations, university staff, and interested recreationists have worked in concert to manage recreational use of the Blackfoot River. The goals of this effort have been to accommodate the high public demand for fishing, floating and related activities, while conserving the river's sensitive resources and respecting the private lands that comprise the majority of stream corridor. The revised Blackfoot River Recreation and Management Plan, adopted in 2010, reflect this nearly five-decade commitment to on-the-ground solutions.

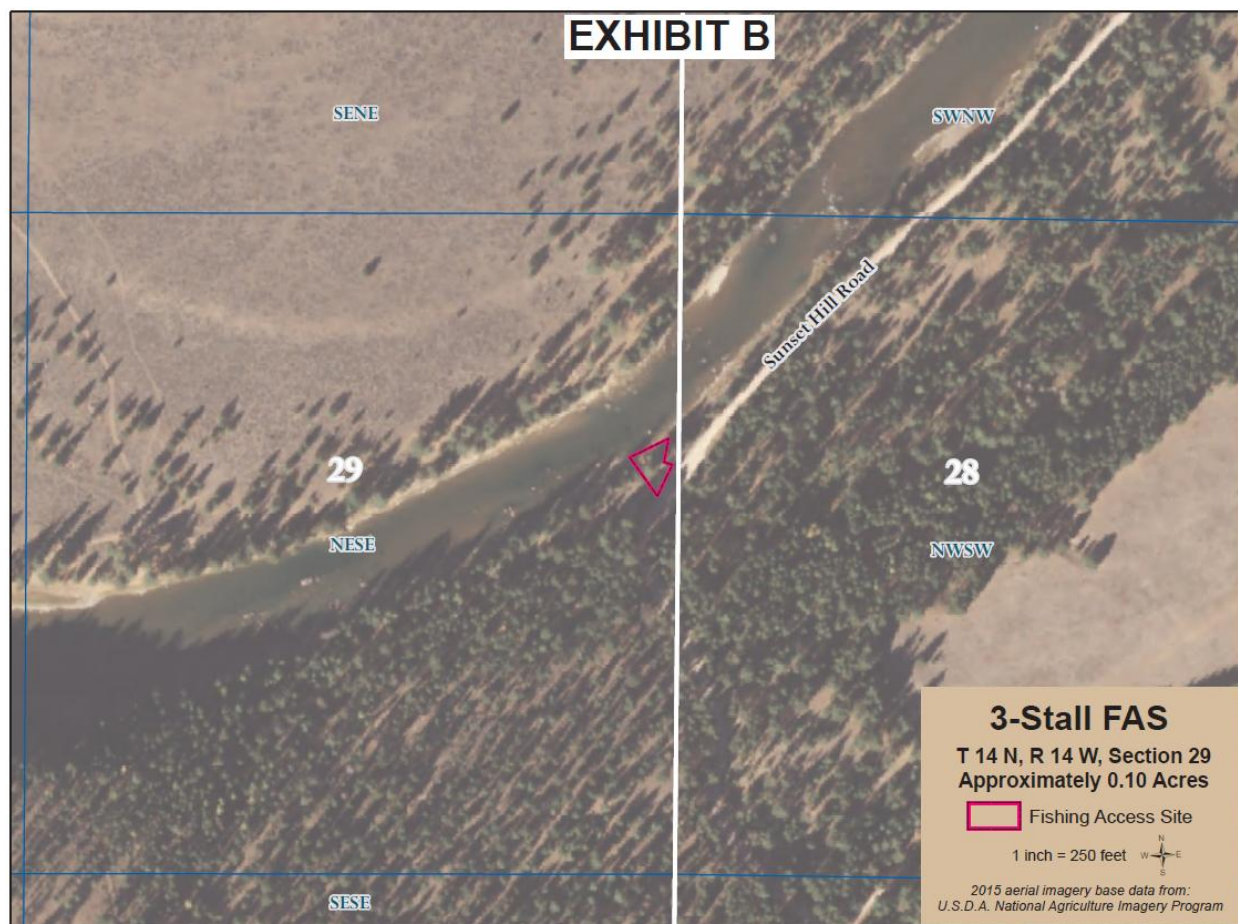


FWP plays a key role in administering recreational use of the Blackfoot River, employing a river ranger and managing more than 20 fishing access sites stretching from the Lincoln area to the river mouth at Bonner. The Roundup and Three Stall fishing access sites have long been part of this network, serving recreationists in the popular Clearwater Junction-Greenough reach of the river. These two sites have traditionally been provided by the landowner free-of-charge. (Three Stall FAS was formerly known as Sunset Hill FAS.)

#### **Need:**

The Three Stall FAS is located amidst the Blackfoot River's prime scenic and fishing waters. Three miles downstream, the Roundup FAS serves as the entry to a popular whitewater section of the river. Both sites are heavily used by the public throughout each floating season. The Roundup site even contains a boat slide built by FWP with landowner permission to facilitate transport of rafts down the steep slope from the parking area to the river shoreline.

Public use of the two sites is currently provided under an informal arrangement between FWP and Monroe Property Company but there has not been a lease or similar written agreement in effect for the past 20 years. Both parties now desire to enter into a formal lease that would more clearly define their respective roles and responsibilities in providing for use and management of these access sites.



### **Agency Authority for the Proposed Action:**

Under the provisions of Section 87-1-209, Montana Code Annotated, FWP has the authority to acquire land or interests in land, including by lease, for public hunting, fishing and trapping areas and for outdoor recreation. The Montana Fish and Wildlife Commission must approve the acquisition of any land interest by the agency for fishing access sites. This environmental assessment is part of the public review and decision-making process for the proposed action.

## **PART II. EFFECTS ON THE NATURAL & HUMAN ENVIRONMENT**

### **A. Overview**

#### **Affected Environment:**

The Roundup FAS comprises four acres of private land with about 300 feet of frontage on the Blackfoot River. Land cover on the bench above (north of) the river consists of open ponderosa pine forest, which is interspersed with unpaved roadways and parking for up to six vehicles. Cottonwood trees and riparian shrubs dot the rocky river front on the south property line. A

wooden boat slide bisects the slope leading to the river, allowing boaters to slide inflated rafts or other watercraft up or down the 20-foot rise between the parking area and the river shoreline.

The Three Stall FAS is approximately one-half acre, with 100 feet of river frontage and space for parking three vehicles. The site also offers a one-acre overflow parking area located on private land south of the FAS along Sunset Hill Road, which is also used by hunters utilizing the Blackfoot Block Management Area. Use of this overflow parking area would also be provided in the lease. Vegetation at the Three Stall FAS consists of a mix of conifers, deciduous trees and riparian shrubs. There are no structures or other improvements onsite.

Both the Roundup and Three Stall fishing access sites have been in operation at their existing locations for approximately 20 years. The proposed action would continue this operation, placing it under the auspices of a written lease agreement between FWP and Monroe Property Company.

#### **Description of Impacts:**

As noted above, the lease would result in the continued operation, maintenance and public use of the Roundup and Three Stall fishing access sites on the Blackfoot River. Environmental impacts that have been experienced on the five total acres of these two fishing access sites would remain and continue, perhaps with incremental increases if recreational use increases at these sites as has occurred along the Blackfoot River in recent years.

Through the years, the primary noticeable impacts at these FASs have been compressed soil in the parking areas/driveways and minor erosion on foot trails down to and along the river. Periodic traffic congestion also occurs, particularly during busy summer weekends.

Other than these minor, localized impacts, the past 20 years have shown no evidence that public use of these fishing access sites is impairing natural resource character or quality, or harming fish or wildlife habitat.

## **B. Environmental Impact Review**

### Land Resources

The proposed lease would have negligible effects on land resources, consisting of soil compaction caused by vehicle parking and limited erosion caused by pedestrian use of trails. These minor impacts have occurred at both of the fishing access sites for many decades, but do not appear to be accelerating or affecting water quality in the river.

Additionally, the existing FWP boat slide at the Roundup FAS mitigates potential soil erosion by providing a low-impact way for rafts and other watercraft to be ferried to water level, without being dragged over the dirt slope.

### Air Resources

The proposed lease would have negligible effects on air resources, consisting of minor amounts of airborne dust from vehicles driving on the roads and parking areas during dry conditions.



### Water Resources

The proposed lease would have no effect on water resources. There are no water courses or drainage ways leading from either fishing access site to the Blackfoot River, while recreational activities along the cobble-lined shorelines have not shown evidence of sediment release into the water.

### Vegetation Resources

The proposed lease would not impact native vegetation, as the existing natural cover at the Roundup and Three Stall fishing access sites would be retained. Spotted knapweed is among the nonnative noxious weeds known to be present at the two fishing access sites, and FWP would include these sites in its regional FAS weed management program. Weed management activities would include inventorying noxious weeds and taking onsite measures, including targeted herbicide spray where appropriate and consistent with label restrictions, to reduce noxious weed infestations.

### Fish and Wildlife Resources

Two wide-ranging terrestrial species, the Canada lynx and grizzly bear, are federally listed as threatened (under the Endangered Species Act) and occur at low densities in the Blackfoot Valley, making occasional use of the river corridor. However, the fishing access sites would be operated as day-use only, with no camping permitted. As a result the sites would offer no food attractants for bears, nor opportunities for incidental contact between humans and bear or lynx during night time when the sites are closed to public use. Moreover, the daytime recreational traffic at the fishing access sites is likely to discourage visitation by these generally secretive species, especially given the hundreds of thousands of acres of undeveloped land nearby. As a result, neither contact nor conflict between the public and lynx or grizzly bear is anticipated.

The federally listed bull trout (threatened species) and the westslope cutthroat trout (Montana Species of Concern or SOC<sup>1</sup>) have relatively strong populations in the Blackfoot River and tributaries, but both species are considered susceptible to potential adverse impacts from habitat change. Because of this sensitivity and its relatively lower population numbers, fishing for or harvesting bull trout is illegal in the Blackfoot drainage. Westslope cutthroat populations have generally increased over the past decades in the Blackfoot drainage, a result attributable to improvements in water quality and access to spawning areas, along with harvest restrictions. Fishing for westslope cutthroat trout remains a popular activity on the river. Neither the westslope nor the bull trout is anticipated to be adversely impacted by continuation of public use of the two fishing access sites covered by the proposed lease.

Blackfoot Valley bird species that are listed as sensitive by public agencies (Montana Natural Heritage Program, U.S. Forest Service, Bureau of Land Management) include the goshawk, golden eagle, peregrine falcon, great gray owl, black-backed woodpecker and trumpeter swan

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<sup>1</sup> A native animal breeding in Montana that is considered to be “at risk” due to declining population trends, threats to its habitats, and/or restricted distribution. The purpose of Montana's SOC listing is to highlight species in decline and encourage conservation efforts to reverse population declines and prevent the need for future listing as Threatened or Endangered Species under the Federal Endangered Species Act. Further information is available at the Montana Natural Heritage Program’s website at <http://mtnhp.org/SpeciesOfConcern/?AorP=a> (accessed 26 July 2016).

(which was recently reintroduced into the Blackfoot Valley). None of these species are known to be adversely impacted by the level of dispersed recreational use characteristic of the FWP fishing access sites along the Blackfoot River, including the two sites proposed for lease under this environmental assessment.

#### Human Environment

The proposed lease would not adversely impact land use, human health, community integrity, public services, taxes, or cultural and historic resources. The lease would have a positive impact on public recreation by securing opportunities for recreationists to access the scenic waters of the Blackfoot River in the vicinity of the Roundup and Three Stall fishing access sites.

### **PART III. ANALYSIS AND ALTERNATIVES**

#### **Alternatives to the Proposed Action:**

FWP's objective under the proposed action is to continue to provide public Blackfoot River access at the Roundup and Three Stall fishing access sites. The private landowner has agreed to provide the lease at no cost.

The access sites are not being offered for sale to FWP, so acquisition of the land by purchase is not an available alternative.

The remaining alternative is "no action," under which FWP would not pursue the lease. In that case, the landowner could continue to allow public river access, but would be under no obligation to do so. Moreover, the landowner has expressed a strong desire to have a formal agreement defining roles and responsibilities for site administration and management. The no-action alternative does not meet the landowner's wishes, and thus does not offer assurance that the landowner would continue to make the Roundup and Three Stall sites available to public use. As a result, the no-action alternative could jeopardize public use of these important access sites and does not meet FWP's objective.

#### **Environmental Impact Statement Determination:**

The information reviewed and analyzed in this environmental assessment has identified a very limited number of minor impacts from the proposed action. Overall, the proposed lease of the Roundup and Three Stall fishing access sites would not contribute to any potentially significant impacts to the physical or human environment.

Does the proposed action involve potential risks or adverse effects, which are uncertain but extremely harmful if they were to occur? No

Does the proposed action have impacts that are individually minor, but cumulatively significant or potentially significant? No

Based on these considerations, and significance of the environmental effects evaluated in this environmental assessment, is an environmental impact statement required? No

**Summary:**

This proposed lease between Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks and Monroe Property Company. continues an established pattern of public use at the Roundup and Three Stall fishing access sites, with no adverse effects on the natural or human environment. The lease also provides appropriate assurances to the landowner regarding FWP responsibilities for managing this important public recreation site. And the lease represents a positive outcome for the many recreationists who appreciate and make use of the opportunities for fishing, whitewater boating, wildlife viewing and other river recreation provided by the exceptional network of fishing access sites along the Blackfoot River.

**PART IV. PUBLIC PARTICIPATION****Public Comment:**

The public will be notified in the following manners to comment on the Draft EA and proposed Fishing Access Lease for the Roundup and Three Stall Sites on the Blackfoot River:

- One legal notice in each of these newspapers: the, the *Independent Record* (Helena), *Missoulian*, and the *Seeley Swan Pathfinder* (respectively, FWP's newspaper of record, Region 2 FWP's newspaper of record and the local newspaper).
- Public notice on the Fish, Wildlife & Parks web page: <http://fwp.mt.gov> ("News," then "Recent Public Notices"). The Draft EA will also be available on this website, along with the opportunity to submit comments online.
- Copies of the Draft EA will be available at the Region 2 headquarters in Missoula and the State Headquarters in Helena.
- Copies of this environmental assessment will be mailed (or notification of its availability emailed) to neighboring landowners and other interested parties (individuals, groups, agencies) to ensure their knowledge of the Proposed Action.

**Comment Deadline:**

The public comment period will extend for fourteen (14) days and will begin with publication of the legal notice in the *Missoulian* (which is expected to be July 29). **Comments will be accepted until 5:00 p.m. on August 15, 2016** and can be e-mailed to [shrose@mt.gov](mailto:shrose@mt.gov), phoned to 406-542-5540, or mailed to this address:

Region 2 FWP  
Attn: Sharon Rose  
3201 Spurgin Ave  
Missoula, MT 59804

**PART V. EA PREPARATION****EA Prepared by:**

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Hugh Zackheim, Natural Resource Consultant (Helena)